



STUDENT SCORE

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From EVERLASTING to EVERLASTING

The Story of the Christmas Wreath

Processional: *Of the Father's Love Begotten*

Invocation: Pastor

Prayer: Gracious Lord God, . . . Amen

Responsive Reading: (Psalm 90:1,2; 103:17-22; 145:13)

P: Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.

C: *Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world,*

Children: From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

P: The Lord is faithful in all his promises and loving toward all he has made.

C: *The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all those who are bowed down.*

Children: From everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—

P: With those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

C: *The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.*

Children: Praise the Lord, you his angels you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his Word.

P: Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.

C: *Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion.*

All: *Praise the Lord, O my soul.*

Pastor's Introduction: Christmas is a time of joy. . Our message is titled *From everlasting to everlasting: The Story of the Christmas Wreath*.

Congregation: *O Come, Little Children*

Part 1: THE ADVENT WREATH

Narrator 1: One of the most familiar wreaths we see very early in the Christmas holiday season is the Advent Wreath. We set out this wreath at the beginning of Advent, four weeks before Christmas. Like many of our Christmas traditions, we are not certain exactly when and where the Advent Wreath began. Some sources say that it may have risen from a pagan custom among the Germanic tribes. Supposedly these people tried to break the darkness of winter by lighting candles as they called upon the sun to send them warmth and light. The evergreens shaped in a circle reminded them that eventually spring would come back once more in the circle of life.

Narrator 2: In later years, Christians put new meaning to the Advent Wreath. They said that the candles pointed not to the sun god, but rather to the Savior, the Light of the World.

Recitation: (John 13:19, 21) "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world. Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Recitation: (John 8:12) "[Jesus said] I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Recitation: (Revelation 21:23) "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."

Narrator 2: The evergreens placed in the wreath now remind Christians that God gives new and everlasting life to his people. We also decorate the wreath with five candles representing the four weeks of preparation before Christmas and a special Christ candle in the center.

Narrator 1: Following the Reformation, the Advent Wreath became popular in many German homes and churches. With the lighting of the candles, fathers would teach their families about the coming of Jesus. Today many of our homes and churches still follow that wonderful tradition.

Song: *The Advent Candles* (first candle)

[Sung to the melody of: *How Firm a Foundation, Firm Foundation melody*]

("Advent Candles" lyrics used by permission of Sandra Dean, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada)

A candle is burning, a flame warm and bright;
A candle of **HOPE** in December's dark night.
While angels sing blessings from heavn's starry sky,
Our hearts we prepare now, for Jesus is nigh.

Student: The first candle in the Advent Wreath is called the candle of HOPE or the Prophecy Candle. This candle reminds us of the many prophecies that point toward Jesus, the Hope of God's people.

Recitation: (Psalm 33:20) "We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice and we trust in his holy name."

Song: *The Advent Candles* (second candle)

A candle is burning, now we must **PREPARE**;
Our hearts we make ready as Christ enters there,
For Jesus is coming to show us the way;
We welcome him here in our lives now this day.

Student: The second candle on our Advent Wreath is the Bethlehem Candle or the Candle of Preparation. God kept his promise to send a Savior. Today we prepare ourselves for the second coming of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Recitation: (Isaiah 40:3-5) "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'"

Recitation: (James 5:8) "You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."

Song: *The Advent Candle* (third candle)

A candle is burning, a candle of **JOY**;
A candle to welcome brave Mary's new Boy.
Our hearts fill with wonder, our eyes light and glow
As joy brightens winter like sunshine on snow.

Student: This brings us to the third candle which is the Shepherd Candle or the Candle of Joy. Can you imagine the joy that filled the hearts of the shepherds when they heard the good news that the long-awaited Messiah was born, and that they could go to see him and worship him? Certainly the joy that was heard in the voices of the angels was felt by the lowly shepherds that blessed night.

Recitation: (John 15:11) "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Recitation: (1 Peter 1:8) "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."

Song: *The Advent Candle* (fourth candle)

A candle is burning, a candle of **LOVE**;
A candle to point us to heaven above.
A Baby for Christmas, a wonderful birth;
For Jesus is bringing God's love to our earth.

Student: The fourth candle that is lit on our Advent Wreath is called the Candle of Love or the Angel Candle. The angels announced to the shepherds that the Savior was born in Bethlehem. They were overwhelmed by the love that God had

shown to them. We also realize the tremendous love that God has for us. Just think, Jesus came to earth not to live a good and happy life, but to die a horrible death on a cross because of us sinners. That kind of love is hard for us to imagine.

Recitation: (Jeremiah 31:3) “I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”

Recitation: (John 3:16,17) “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Song: *The Advent Candle* (fifth candle)

We honor Messiah in *Christ-Candle’s* flame;
Our Christmas Eve candles glad tidings proclaim.
O come, all ye faithful, rejoice on this night
As God comes among us, the Christian’s true Light.

Student: The very last candle that we light on our Advent Wreath is called the Christ Candle. It is white and symbolizes Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, who came to earth to wash away our sins. Though they were bright red as scarlet, he covered them all and made them as white as snow.

Recitation: (Luke 2:1-20) “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’

“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’\ “So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

Congregation: *Silent Night*

Part 2: THE WREATH OF THORNS

Narrator 1: The next wreath we see today is not a pleasant wreath at all. It’s not a wreath that one would like to hang on the front door at Christmastime, because it is a terrible wreath—it is a Wreath of Thorns. You might wonder how we can call Jesus’ crown of thorns a wreath. The true definition of the word “wreath” means “an intertwined circle of flowers, branches, or leaves that one wears on the head as a mark of honor or victory.” Unfortunately we know that the wreath that Jesus wore on his head when he was so cruelly mocked and tortured by the Roman soldiers was a sign of painful mockery.

Narrator 2: Do you remember when thorns were first mentioned in the Bible? They were part of the curse that God placed on Adam and Eve after they sinned and were forced from the beautiful Garden of Eden.

Recitation: (Genesis 3:17,18) “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.”

Narrator 2: Just a short time after God had said that everything was very good, he cursed the ground with thorns and thistles. Before that time, plants were wonderful things that Adam and Eve and the animals enjoyed for their food and

beauty. They made the Garden of Eden a joyful place to live. Thorns were placed on this earth as a reminder of the pain, destruction, and suffering caused by sin.

Narrator 1: And now, when we fast forward to the New Testament, we see those cursed thorns being used to cause pain to the innocent Jesus. The soldiers took branches that had inch-long thorns, and they wove a wreath for Jesus' head. Then they brutally pressed it into his skull. That Wreath of Thorns became Jesus' own funeral wreath.

Recitation: (Matthew 27:29,30) “[They] wove a crown of thorns and set it on his head. . . They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.”

Narrator 1: The thorns that Jesus wore show us that the Savior took on himself the curse that was placed on people way back in Genesis. Because of sin, Jesus had to endure the pain that those thorns caused. The Wreath of Thorns teaches us two things: First, Jesus was, and is, indeed a king. Although the soldiers thought they were ridiculing Jesus with their mockery of making him their “king”, little did they realize that there will come another day when they will have to bow before that same Jesus who will return as the King of the universe. Second, Jesus was willing to endure the pain, insults and shame, all on our account. The Wreath of Thorns stands as a sad reminder of the pain and torture our sins brought upon our own precious Lord Jesus. Yet when we see Jesus again, he will not be wearing the Wreath of Thorns, but rather the Wreath of Glory!

Congregation: *Crown Him with Many Crowns* (V. 1,2,5)

Recitation: (Hebrews 2:7,9) “You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor. . . We see Jesus, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

Song by Children: *If I Had Been in Bethlehem*

1. If I had been in Bethlehem the night of Jesus' birth;
And heard afar the angels' joyful song of peace on earth;
If I had seen the shepherds come to seek the baby fair,
I think I would have followed them, and knelt beside them there.

2. If I had lived in eastern lands and watched with eager eyes;
If I had seen his star appear and blaze among the skies;
If I had seen the wise men go to seek the newborn King,
I think I would have followed them, my finest gifts to bring.

3. I did not live in Bethlehem that Christmas night of old,
Or travel with the wise men there, to bring him gifts of gold,
But I can give a greater gift than any earthly gem,
For all my heart and all my love will be my gift to him.

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Part 3: THE LAUREL WREATH

Narrator 1: The history of the wreath dates back to Greece and Rome where the people would make ring-shaped “wreaths” using fresh leaves, twigs, small fruits and flowers. Sometimes they even decorated them with precious jewels. The most important people in those days wore these headdresses as a sign of occupation or rank. Originally this circle of living branches was called a “diadem”. The wreath or diadem that was most popular was made of laurel branches called the Laurel Wreath. These special wreaths were awarded to the athletes who were winners in the Greek Olympic Games. The host city would fashion the head wreath awards, much like the host country designs the Olympic medals today. The laurel wreath was truly a sign of victory and royalty! The Roman king, Julius Caesar, often wore a laurel wreath on his head designating him as king.

Narrator 2: Are you training for the Olympics? That might sound like a silly question, but as God's children, we are also in training. We are also running in a race. It's called the race of life. Our life is like running on a track, where there are all sorts of difficulties and obstacles.

The Apostle Paul must have enjoyed sports because he often mentioned sports in his letters. In those days, the winners in the Corinthian games were awarded pine wreaths that were placed on their heads. In Athens they received an olive wreath and in Delphi it was a laurel wreath. Paul tells God's people to keep running the race of life until we gain the victory at the end, and are awarded the wreath of victory. Paul wrote:

Recitation: (1 Corinthians 9:24 Amplified Bible) "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run your race that you may lay hold of the prize and make it yours."

Narrator 2: But Paul went on to explain something important about the crown of living greens that was placed on the victors' heads. That crown eventually dried up and turned brown and brittle.

Recitation: (1 Corinthians 9:25 Amplified Bible) "Now every athlete who goes into training conducts himself temperately and restricts himself in all things. They do it to win a wreath that will soon wither, but we do it to receive a crown of eternal blessedness that cannot wither."

Narrator 2: We are blessed to know that one day, after our race here on earth is finished, with the help of the Holy Spirit we will be awarded that crown of final victory. What a wonderful wreath that will be for us to wear!

Recitation: (2 Timothy 4:8) "There is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

Recitation: Fast by the throne of God behold them (hold hand outward in welcoming position)
Crowned at last! Crowned at last!
See in His arms the Savior fold them, (cross arms across chest in rocking motion)
Crowned at last! Crowned at last!
With wreaths of glory round their head; (place hands on sides of head)
No tears of sorrow now are shed,
To joy's full fountain all are led: (point upward with both hands)
Crowned at last! Crowned at last!

Offering, Prayers, Lord's Prayer: Pastor

Part 4: THE CHRISTMAS WREATH

Narrator 1: And now we take a look at the beautiful green wreath that we hang on our front doors at Christmastime, welcoming guests into our homes. Hanging the wreath on the door should mean that this is the home of Christians, followers of Jesus. We also display these wonderful green circles in our churches and schools.

We aren't certain where the tradition of hanging the evergreen wreath began, however; some suggest that it may have been started by the athletes who displayed their trophy wreaths on the walls of their houses. Traditionally, evergreen branches and especially the holly branches were used to form the circle shape. The use of holly seems to date back to the Romans, however; Christians adopted the symbolism and said the holly, with its prickly green leaves, represents Jesus' crown of thorns, while the brilliant red berries reflect the blood that he shed on the cross.

Song by Children: *Come, See the Baby*
By Karen Maio

Come see the baby lying in the manger,
His name is Jesus; He's God's own Son.
This little baby boy will be our Savior.
He is the Christ the Anointed One.

Refrain
Tiny baby, precious Savior,
Born to be our Lord and King,
We will worship and adore you.
Joyful praise to you we sing.

Come see the baby lying in the manger,
Child of Mary, yet Son of God.
He'll live the perfect life that we cannot live,
And He'll die for us on the cross. Refrain.

Come see the baby lying in the manger,
Humble He lies in the cattle stall.
One day this baby boy will be exalted,
Our risen Savior, the Lord of all. Refrain.

Narrator 2: The Christmas wreaths on our front doors carry with them many symbols. First, the color of the evergreens signify the living hope that we have in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, while the red bow or berries remind us of the blood that Jesus shed on the cross.

Recitation: (Isaiah 1:18) "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."

Narrator 2: And lastly there is the recognizable shape. The circle has neither a beginning nor an end. The shape of the wreath tells everyone that Jesus has no beginning and no end, and it also reminds us that everyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life in Christ Jesus. As the Bible says, God's love is from everlasting to everlasting!

Recitation: (John 3:36) "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life."

Recitation: (John 5:24) "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

All Children: (Psalm 90:1,2) "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

All Children: (Psalm 103:17) "From everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children."

Song by Children: *From Everlasting to Everlasting*

By Karen Maio

Refrain
From everlasting to everlasting
He is God and God alone!
He is the Alpha and the Omega;
Seated on His heav'nly throne.

1. Like the wreath, He is unending,
The holly: thorns upon His head.
The evergreens will live forever.
And ribbons show the blood He shed.

2. Out of love He sent a Savior,
Who lived a perfect life for me.
Now by grace through faith in Jesus,
Heaven is ours eternally.

3. He's the God of all creation,
Before the mountains came to be.
He's the Word made flesh, Messiah,
The promised Savior sent for me!

Benediction and Announcements: Pastor

Recessional by Congregation: *Joy to the World*

OPTIONAL SONGS

The following two songs are very fitting for this service and may be used if desired.

Sheet music for both songs can be found at www.christmas-carol-music.org.

The Holly and the Ivy

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown

[Refrain:]

O, the rising of the sun,
And the running of the deer
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a blossom,
As white as lily flow'r,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
To be our dear Savior
[Refrain]

The holly bears a berry,
As red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
To do poor sinners good
[Refrain]

The holly bears a prickly,
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
On Christmas Day in the morn
[Refrain]

The holly bears a bark,
As bitter as the gall,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
For to redeem us all
[Refrain]

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown
[Refrain]

Sans Day Carol

1. Now the holly bears a berry as white as the milk,
And Mary bore Jesus, who was wrapped up in silk:

Chorus: And Mary bore Jesus Christ our Savior for to be,
And the first tree in the greenwood, it was the holly.
Holly! Holly!
And the first tree in the greenwood, it was the holly!

2. Now the holly bears a berry as green as the grass,
And Mary bore Jesus, who died on the cross: *Chorus*

3. Now the holly bears a berry as black as the coal,
And Mary bore Jesus, who died for us all: *Chorus*

4. Now the holly bears a berry, as blood is it red,
Then trust we our Savior, who rose from the dead: *Chorus*